



'NORMALIZING' THE 'WEST' IN BOLLYWOOD MOVIES, POST 1990

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ABSTRACT

The aim of my paper is to look at movies post 1990, 'post globalization', and try and understand what impact has language of different forms have had on the Masses. Languages, here lets look specifically at assumed language, made up language and what then becomes 'correct' and what becomes 'wrong' in terms of language. While doing so we will discuss about other techniques that Indian cinema uses to present and represent 'normal'. This also includes the creation of the 'normal'. As the title of the paper suggests 'Normalizing western culture'. I'll try to define what 'western culture' is and what these Bollywood movies perceive as 'western', and try and understand these twisted ways of our Bollywood and its ways of these different understandings of the 'western'. In doing so we will look at examples of various Bollywood movies, concentrating on certain scenes, words, style and its impact on the masses at large. The impact of globalization and liberalization on Bollywood has been of a great one. The discussion will evaluate the success of some of these movies, which cannot be understood without the impact of these landmark events. One of the main ideas that the paper explores, is the way in which these normative patterns have changed and are accepted by masses at large, post globalization and post liberalization. How certain ideas are so easily overlooked or passed off as a comic element in the movie. We will look at examples of a set of movies, that did economically well not only in India but abroad as well, these movies had an emotional quotient attached to them that appealed to Indians across national boundary!

KEYWORDS: Films, Bollywood, the West, decoding, globalisation, liberalisation

'Normal', what is 'normal'?

Is it preconceived? Is it constructed? Is it given? In any which way it comes down to us. Then the question arises, is it enforced? How it is modified for convenience. The thread that I shall use to define Normal or Normalization will be creation, modification, and enforcement of these 'norms'. Some of the 'popular' definitions of 'Normal' are – "Something that is normal is usual and ordinary, and is what people expect", "Conforming to a style, standard and regular pattern", "not abnormal", "serving to establish a standard". These definitions are not different from each. Saying the same thing in different words.

Then again, when we say that 'Normal' is something that people expect and something that's usual, that is a preconceived notion. Something that is handed down to us. Which sets a standard and makes it by default 'universal'. The best example can be how the act of respecting parents is a 'normal' thing, something that is expected and which, again, by default becomes what is right. So 'normal' raises another major question in front of us, as to what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. Here comes the concept of 'creating' Normal and then modifying it to suite one's own convenience. In reference to Bollywood, these 'normal' characteristics were either re-instigated with subtle force or they were challenged and questioned. Movies like Humara Dil Aapke Paas Hai (1999) and Hum Aapke Dil Mein Rehete Hain (2000), two Anil Kapoor movies that came back-to-back spoke about two 'concepts' that were looked down upon by the society at large. Humara Dil Aapke Paas Hai (1999) had a backdrop of a 'contract marriage' which as per cultural understanding of India is something that is not 'normal', something that people don't expect, something that is 'wrong'. But somehow, as creative as our Bollywood is, this concept was proved to be 'good' for both, the husband and the wife. The movie was enjoyed and applauded by the audience. In Humara Dil Aapke Paas Hai (2000), the backdrop is of a rich respected man accepting and marrying a girl who has been raped. In Indian society no man has ever wanted to marry a girl who has had 'tainted' past. But in this movie, Anil Kapoor, being the ethical, rational, chivalrous man, he accepts a girl who has been raped when her own family refused to accept her. While Humara Dil Aapke Paas Hai (1999) subtly removes/ overlaps the idea of 'contract marriage' with the ideas of love, family, redemption, etc. Questioning the idea of 'contract marriage' and yet normalizing by the end with the most optimistic line of all times 'Whatever happens, happens for the best', Humara Dil Aapke Paas Hai (2000) on the other hand challenges the 'norms' and comes up with a rational solution and a rational understanding of the society.

So clearly these questions are self evolving and extremely complicated to have a decided answer as to what is 'Normal'? How is an idea 'Normalized'? How do these ideas come to be a 'norm'? So the question of who decides what is 'normal' and what then becomes 'good' and 'bad' has no fixed answer. People work with these preconceived, given notions and modify them to suit their own situation. This paper will look at the means through which this is done in Bollywood movies, specifically in terms of language, the choice of situation and characterization.

What is "Western Culture"?

Now that I have tried to explain the confusion behind the idea of 'normal', 'nor-

mal', 'norm', and 'normalization', I will jump to the word called 'western', the idea of the 'west' and how someone 'other' than west sees it and perceives it. I would like to start with dictionary meanings of the 'west' or more precisely 'western', "a region or territory situated in this direction, especially the western part of the U.S., as distinguished from the East", "the western part of the world, as distinguished from the East or Orient", "the non-Communist countries of Western Europe and the Americas", "Living in or originating from the west, in particular Europe or America". Once again, all these meanings are one and the same, which is very directional. In reference to the term 'western' I'll take the liberty of going a little further than these dictionary meanings and try and understand it in more political terms and India being a 'South Eastern' country what influence does the 'west' or a developed country, has on a country like India, a country with a colonial past, a developing country, a country that has had constant influence from the west.

West or 'the developed countries' have had influence all over the world and India is an integral part of this world. What then comes from the west, the clothing style, the habits, and the ways of perceiving the world becomes 'Western Culture'. The West has always been 'perceived' as superior as opposed to the east, a classic example could be the understanding of Britain/England as opposed to India. With colonialism India did not only suffer economic imperialism but also cultural imperialism. The influence of the west has its own long history which I shall not go into, but I would contemplate on the influences it has had at large scales. Be it Industrialization, be it the spoken language, be it the behavior of individuals, be it fashion, be it education or ideology, the west has influenced India in every which way. Not that I am denying any other fact that India has played its own role and contributed to the world development. The East and West dichotomy is ongoing. But my paper is not about that.

Before we launch into the illustrated understanding of how Bollywood, with its magnificent and awe-inspiring subtle methods surpasses some major 'western' ideas by over emphasizing the innate Indian-ness, lets try and understand the landmarks of globalization and liberalization and its immediate and long term effect on Bollywood. Globalization and Liberalization in India were marked by some landmark events -

- 1991: Cable and satellite television comes to India following the Gulf War.
- 1991: Free market restructuring carried out under the tutelage of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- 1992: The launch of Zee TV and Star TV.
- 1992: The government greatly liberalized the business and trade requirements, resulting in a great increase in foreign films being released domestically.
- 1994: North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passed.
- 1995: VSNL introduced Internet services in India.
- 1998: India conducts nuclear tests.

The effect of Globalization on Bollywood has been of a great one. This can be traced back to the British history of India and understood in political and economic terms. Acharya, Sharmistha has explained this precisely in her paper

"Bollywood and Globalization", 2011-

"After participating (or being forced to participate) in largely one-way trade via British colonization (which was initially started by the British East India Company), independent India retreated behind a wall of protectionism and socialist style economic planning. It can be argued (Pal, 2001) that in the '80s, India avoided hyperinflation and a Latin America style economic crisis largely due to this type of tight foreign-exchange controls and prudent economic management. Only when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi changed course did India experience a foreign-exchange crisis. India had started depleting its foreign exchange reserves in the late '80s, mainly to hard currency payments for a flood of imports and an increasing amount of foreign debt. A severe fiscal crisis brewed in 1991, when the country only had Bollywood and enough foreign exchange left to pay for a few weeks of imports. The government went to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for help, and consequently India opened up the economy and deregulated the private sector (Pal, 2001). Under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, who assumed office that year, and his successors, restrictions on the multinationals and the private sector have been greatly relaxed. The current governing alliance, headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party's Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has continued the same policies. The public sector is being steadily, albeit slowly, dismantled. Though ten years may be a short period of time, the effect wrought by these changes in India has been dramatic. A big reason for this has been the rise in information technology - wireless telephones, satellite television, and the Internet were all made available in India during this period in part due to the new economic policies. Their adoption has been meteoric. The consequent exposure of Indians to the information explosion outside its borders and the rise of the middle class and their shifting tastes have forced Bollywood to reevaluate its methods of conducting business. Bollywood has been affected thus both directly and indirectly. The direct causes have been the rise of alternate sources of entertainment such as TV, both satellite and Doordarshan, the state run media, and the Internet. On the other hand, the rise of a new middle class, made prosperous by the new jobs being created in India due to globalization, and the Indian diaspora abroad has created an audience whose entertainment expectations have changed."

India is one of the largest producers of films. India produces the largest number of films in the world: "1041 films were produced in India whereas US produced 815 in 2005" (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2007). Bollywood contributes almost 27% to the Indian economy. Bollywood has become a part of Indian family. The Indian middle class is a section of Indian society that is expected to grow at the rate of 5%-10% in the coming years. It is this section of the society that transgresses classes. There has been drastic change in the consumption patterns of 'cars to butter to entertainment', and the credit can be given to these middle-class families, that are trying to move up in the society. It is this section of the economy that contributes to the national economy and the same section is targeted at large by every industry in the market. Post globalization and liberalization, the new technologies are sitting inside almost every middle-class family. This gave rise to the understanding of the Indian society and also can be seen as a great leap for individual progress. This was also the period of industrialization and urbanization in India. Emergence of new elites and rising number of NRIs is evident during this period. There is a growing sense of alienation and atomization, within families. These were some of the major points that effected the making of Bollywood movies, the story lines, and most of all the consumption of these movies.

As already discussed, the term 'normal' as complex as it gets. The West has been constantly attacked and accepted by Indian masses. Nothing shows it better than our very own Bollywood movies and the response that it has got by its audiences. Especially since Indian migration has taken a toll, in other words since the growing number of NRIs. Post liberalization and post globalization there has been major change in the way Bollywood movies were made. 1995 saw one of the first movies that directly targeted the NRIs, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, starring some of the biggest 'stars' of Bollywood - Sharukh Khan, Kajol, Amrith Puri, Farida Jalal and Anupam Kher. This movie gave a new turn to the actors careers as well. The appeal of the movie was huge. The fact that it is still running in one of the theatres in Mumbai, speaks for the movie and its success of itself. The impact of the west is evident. The story, the emotions and the very ideas of the movie was felt by the audience across the national boundary. The dissatisfactions of the NRIs, the frustration of being away from their 'homeland' was something that was one of the most talked about issues at that time. 1997, *Pardes*, another movie of preserving Indian Culture, and the craving for the 'sarso ke khet'. Behind all these on the face of intense desire for the 'homeland' and the idea of returning to the 'roots' people overlooked some of the issues such as language, attire, accent, and the best part - how by some unknown miracle Indians in any foreign land stumble upon only Indians. Lets talk about these overlooked aspects in a while. For now lets concentrate on the 'normalizing of western culture' through language.

Starting off with none other than *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. 1995, post globalization, post liberalization. Bollywood directors started signing deals with foreign countries to promote their countries for tourism. The 'Europe tour' is one of the results of these deals. The highway scene in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, in Zurich, where Simran (Kajol's character) is being accused by the police for trespassing a foreign land without a passport (establishing the strict rules in this country), Raj (Shahrukh Khan's character) jumps into the situation and rescues

Simran. There are three major things that are at work here, one, the tourism aspect, two, the start of Simran's and Raj's friendship, three, something that was overlooked by almost everyone, the language. Simran has lived her whole life in Britain and so has Raj. It is surprising to notice that they hardly ever speak in English. And when they do, their English is anything but conventionally correct. Simran finds it hard to make the police officer understand her situation and Raj comes in and adds the comic element to it by mixing Hindi curse words and European accent - "M Kutto, M sallo, M Kamino, M haraamo". Not only that, he also uses a curse word on Simran, which is taken all in good humor. This has been overlooked for over a decade now. No one has still questioned that mixing up of languages. On the contrary, this very form of language became something so 'normal' that every second person in India was now using those words.

Similarly in a comparatively recent movie, *Salaam Namaste* (2005), the character of Javed Jaffery where without any logic he inserts a 'the' 4-5 times in one sentence. That also was conveniently overlooked under the pretence of a joke. 'Hinglish' has become a new form of language, the 'new generation' is proud to be 'Hinglish' educated. Facebook itself has introduced this category of language called 'Hinglish'.

Not only do they mix up English, to take a step further, these big budget Bollywood movies based in these 'first world countries', where the character is of a renowned stature and is rich in monetary terms they still talk in Hindi and find it difficult to express themselves in English. They don't talk in English at all most of the times which, if done a reality check would be proved wrong. When a person lives in a certain locality they then tend to try to mingle in that society, that society's customs, and their language is something important learn and understand, which also becomes evident for the person to survive sustainably in that society. There are number movies that display this format as though it is totally normal. For example, *Yaadien* (2001), *Pardes* (1997), *Kal Ho Na Ho* (2003), *Kabhie Alvida Na Kehena* (2006), *Singh is King* (2008), *Dostana* (2008), *Patiala House* (2011), *Namaste London* (2007) and many more. The fact remains that these presentations and re-presentations violate the 'norms' and yet they are payed no attention as the larger picture is all flowery and a happy ending.

Then there are these smaller scenes which go totally un-noticed by the audience, where other things are presented in such a magnified way that the focus is entirely on one thing. For instance, in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (2005), in the song 'Ruk ja O dil diwaane.', the scene right before it is a performance by a Opera singer is of a great contrast to the song that follows. Out of nowhere there are twenty Indian dancers that are introduced on the stage, leave out the fact that they dance at a totally unknown song with matching steps. So they all are in Zurich, Raj (Sharukh Khan's character) singing a all Hindi song and people enjoying it. To top it all the opera dancer joins him for a jig in between! There are various other such examples in many other movies. Another common factor that runs through these movies is the sense of community. The sense of being with their 'own' people. Indian guy meets a Indian girl, only an Indian girl, out of the entire population the country that they are in. All their friends are also Indian.

Multiculturalism, majoritism, homogenization and 'ethnic-violence' were some of the reoccurring ideas in these movies. 'Multiculturalism' in itself is a very complicated term. It is not exactly a positive term. For as 'modern' it is to accept different cultures and integrating it with one's own culture it might violate many 'norms' (this violation is again covered up in Bollywood movies by overplay of other emotions), which by many is seen as an 'ethnic-violence'. Homogenization of cultures in movies like *Salaam Namaste* (2005), *Namaste London* (2007), and one of the most recent movies, *Zindagi Na Mileage Dobara* (2011), the change in the style of living, change in dressing up, the way one perceives the world, the way one looks at India and the world, and also one places themselves in the world. It is an outcome homogenized effect. The trends become normal as per their suitability. Wearing miniskirts and having multiple relationships, which was once frowned upon even on the big screen and those notion appealed to the Indian masses at that time. It is an altogether a different scene today, people are comfortable with multiple relationships, and families are liberal enough to let their kids make decisions for themselves. These changing trends in every which way have a direct impact on Bollywood and its audience. The audiences are not passive. They have a mind and background of their own. The way they understand all of these representations, which they anyway are part of in their daily life.

These forms of mixing cultures and separating and keeping it away at the same time has been done in various interesting ways in Bollywood. Sometimes in a character's form, sometimes in the form of an incident or a song sequence. Post Globalization there was introduction of foreign goods, marketing them through movies, and Bollywood being such a stupendous and huge industry had been of a great influence to the Indian audience. Stroh's beer that was introduced at a world scale in a Bollywood movie (*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, 1995) is a single indicator of Globalization happening in India. Since then there have been these big budget movies, that are many a times funded by big multinationals, that can afford the big branded costumes that are 'endorsed' by these huge Bollywood 'stars' in their movies. For example, Kareena Kapoor in *Kambakkht Ishq* (2009), wore Gucci and Globus branded cloths and accessory almost throughout the movie. Sonam Kapoor in *Aisha* (2010), wore brands throughout the movie and the movie itself was about a certain style and sense of living.

All these movies aimed at a set of ideas, the idea of "Phir bhi Dil hai Hindustani", no matter where we live, no matter how we live- India/Bharat/Hindustan lives in our hearts. And there is a kind of 'Bharat' that lives in our hearts, a lush green country, with sarson da saag aur makke di roti, roads bustling with traffic. Parminder Prakash/ Bobby (Kiron Kher's character in Hum Tum, 2004) on returning to India, talks about 'ninge ninge bache' (Naked kids) on the streets, which apparently she missed so much while living in Paris. Then there is the notion of community, a sense of belonging even while living in a society that they think they don't belong to. For example, in Yaadien (2001), The Malhotra family is friends with the Puri family and one of the motives of the Malhotra to stay friends with Puris' is that they feel a sense of community, culturally like minded people. People, one knows will stand up for you, will be there when needed, a strong need to hold back to those notions and ideas that one has lived in. A similar case can be seen in Pardes (1997), a comparatively older movie. Pardes (1997) is one of the finest examples, that depicts the notion of holding tight to one's own community, Kishorilal (Amrish Puri's character) is a wealthy and successful businessman who lives in Los Angeles, America but is still deeply attached to his motherland India and adores the values and culture of India. On a visit to India, he meets his old friend Suraj Dev (Alok Nath's character) and stays at his house. During his stay he gets to know Suraj Dev's family and becomes very attached to Ganga, Dev's eldest daughter, who is the epitome of Indian culture. He hopes to find an Indian girl for his westernized, American son, Rajiv (Apoorva Agnihotri's character) and feels that Ganga (Mahima Chaudhary's character) is just right. He offers a marriage proposal between Ganga and Rajiv; Dev's family accepts. Namaste London (2007), is one of the most recent examples of a Bollywood movie in reference to returning to the homeland to search for a groom to their British-Indian daughter Jasmeet/Jazz (Katrina Kaif's character), this movie's initial story is almost the same as Pardes (1997). A disgruntled father, who is Indian at heart, who wants his daughter to settle down and live a happy life. Which he thinks he can find in India alone. The song that plays in the foreground on their return to India (Main jahnaa rahoon..) again establishes all the points.

These can be understood as some of the best techniques that the producers and directors have used in their movies to bring 'west' in their living rooms. They have 'normalized' the lives of these NRIs, by bringing forth the idea of being true to their Indian identity. This is also a way of understanding how 'global' becomes 'glocal'. The integration of the global and the local, to accommodate to the societal 'norms'. This is how something that is initially not accepted by masses at large but then is introduced to the same people in a way that may appeal to them and makes them feel connected to it. NRIs live in this 'modern' sense of living, they have achieved what they wanted in these foreign lands but the ultimate and final need of every Indian is to 'come' back or 'go' back to their 'desh'. Addressing to the Indian Diaspora's nostalgia for homeland.

The idea behind giving these long and somewhat tiresome examples of Indian Diaspora was to explain that these Bollywood movies have had various agendas in making these movies. They were working given a new contract that Indian directors could go to these particular countries, which would in turn be a boom for the tourism industry (estimating the impact of Bollywood on Indian masses) and then to make them a part of this globally integrating society. This was also the time when the concept of 'Brain Drain' was being talked about at large. Which was not a good sign for Indian economy and many people were debating for it. So these bright minds, that went to foreign countries, were shown to be regretting leaving their homeland for their own benefit. Indian Cinema was and is of an influence on the Indian audience within the national boundary and beyond it. Post globalization and post liberalization, Bollywood has become one of the biggest economic industries of India. It has used the benefits of Globalization and Liberalization to its own ends.

Conclusion

The ways in which Bollywood have ignored these flaws and made them seem 'normal' are marvelous. Quite prominent and yet quite easily overlooked. The presentation of the 'west' in these Bollywood movies is quite appealing to the Indian eye. Globalization and liberalization brought television to every door step, television signed deals with movie make for the promotion of their movies and for world wide television premier rights. So these movies were as private as public. These movies were talking about family issues, making everyone a part of this rapidly changing world scenario. All these movies made the 'west' as a part of the global identity. There have been a growing number of American-Indian identities and British-Indian identities, who are working in multinationals to live up to a certain standard of living, and are getting acknowledged globally. This has its own side effects, a sense of lost community, uprooting one's own identity and living a 'new' life. Our Bollywood movie makers have made some of the best movies of all times on this genre. 'Normalizing' it through overemphasis on the love for the Indian culture.

Moving away for better job prospects has been a 'normal' thing for the new generation. But recently some new concepts have been introduced, such as looking for a change of air, change of scene, getting away for a vacation, for relaxation. The directors of these movies have tried to retain the Indian identity there as well!

Indian cinema at large has been propagating the notion of 'normal' forever. It is just 'normal' for all the NRIs to return to their 'origins' and it is normal to have only Indian friends in a nation where the entire population is of a altogether dif-

ferent religion, language, etc. It is perfectly normal to speak in English no matter what in these foreign lands and yet somehow the protagonist is one of the most prestigious people in that state!

This works for the audience. They feel for the Indians living away from their families. Most of these movies work on the idea of catharsis. They evoke all the sentiments and emotions of the audience by relating it directly to them. This overdramatization and accentuating one aspect over the other had been the technique of our Bollywood directors to overlap these flaws. They have used these flaws to their own ends, for a certain result that they wanted out of it and which they did get from the audiences.

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